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FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

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INFO RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE

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TAGS: SENV EAGR FAID TBIO ECON SOCI XR BR

SUBJECT: SOUTH AMERICA ESTH NEWS, NUMBER 91

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¶1. The following is the ninety-first in a series of newsletters, published by the Brasilia Regional Environmental Hub, covering environment, science and technology, and health news in South America. The information below was gathered from news sources from across the region, and the views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Hub office or our constituent posts. Addressees who would like to receive a user-friendly email version of this newsletter should contact Larissa Stoner at stonerla@state.gov. The e-mail version also contains a calendar of

upcoming ESTH events in the region.

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Agriculture

13. Brazil Uses Agriculture to Fight Poverty in Africa

MAR. 05, 2007 - Representatives of Embrapa (Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agrícola - Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation) met on Friday, March 2, in Brasilia, with diplomats of 18 African embassies to present the objectives of the organization's new office in Africa. "We want to associate ourselves with the African countries. We want to make agreements for cooperation in the area of technology transfer for tropical agriculture," stated the acting head of the international area at Embrapa, Washington Silva. The Embrapa Africa office is an initiative in the Brazilian policy to transfer agricultural technology to the African nations. Since December last year, when the office was opened in the city of Accra, researchers of the International Cooperation Advisory at the Embrapa have been discussing ways to promote the use of Brazilian technology to generate growth, reduce social inequality, fight hunger and

poverty and work with small farmers for a sustainable cycle.

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Source - Brazilmag

14. Seminar on Responsible Soy Production in Berlin

MAR. 15, 2007 - On 28 February, some 60 participants attended a seminar addressing responsible soy production. The seminar was organized by WWF and GTZ (German agency for technical cooperation). The negative social and environmental impacts of increasing conventional soy production in Latin America are severe. One way of addressing problems is through the RTRS (Roundtable on Responsible Soy), an international roundtable dialogue group with stakeholders throughout the supply chain committed to developing globally applicable criteria for more responsible soy production, procurement, and use. The development process is expected to begin soon and continue for about two years. Some progressive companies such as Campina and Imcopa have also moved ahead with producing and sourcing soy according to the Basel Criteria, the pioneer standards first adopted by the Swiss retailer Coop in 2004. The first "Basel soy" arrived in Europe from Brazil in June 2006. The Berlin seminar looked at whether already existing production models address social and environmental concerns, and at experience already gained.

Source - WWF News

15. Colombia Approves GM Corn

MAR. 7, 2007 - Colombia has allowed genetically modified (GM) corn to enter its borders for the first time, and will authorize plantations of other GM products later in the year. The Colombian Institute of Agriculture (ICA) approved one hundred kilograms of GM corn for import last month, half of which is resistant to a herbicide and the other half to insects. Andres F. Arias, from the Ministry of Agriculture, says growers from four regions of Colombia - Cesar, Huila, Sucre and Tolima - will be allowed to buy the seeds. Ana Luisa Diaz, of ICA, told SciDev.Net that authorization has been given only to regions where the Institute has done controlled biosafety assessments. The ICA will conduct follow-up biosafety studies of the seed from planting until harvest. Colombia is one of the 22 countries to have planted GM seeds. Of its cotton plantations, 41 per cent (22.7 hectares) are the GM variety Bt.

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Source - SciDev

Health

16. IDB Donates USD 900,000 to Combat Chagas Disease in Latin America

FEB. 27, 2007 - The Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) has donated USD 900,000 to combat Chagas disease in Latin America - one of the most prevalent diseases in the region. The project, announced on February 16 will apply to Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Uruguay. The money will be invested in vector control and the elaboration and application of communication strategies to ensure the participation of local communities in preventing the disease. Funds will also be used to treat children under the age of 15 who are infected since the disease can be reverted during this age period.

Source - SciDev

Forests

17. Paraguay Extends Forest Conversion Law

MAR. 15, 2007 - The government of Paraguay has extended a law to curb deforestation rates in the Upper Paran Atlantic Forest. The Zero Deforestation Law, which came into force in December 2004, and would have expired at the end of 2006, was extended in December by another two years. To date, the law has helped cut the deforestation rate in Paraguay by more than 85 per cent. The Upper Paran Atlantic Forest is one of the world's most ecologically important regions. It is known for its rich biodiversity and high level of species endemism. But the forest is also one of the world's most endangered tropical forests. In many areas over 95 per cent of the natural forest has been lost as a result of agricultural expansion, especially for soy production and cattle ranching. A WWF report indicates that Paraguay does not need to cut down more forest to continue agricultural production, especially for soy and

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livestock. Data from Oil World indicates that the deforestation law has not affected soy production in Paraguay, the world's fourth largest soybean exporter. Production has actually increased in spite of the law.

Source - WWF News

18. Peru Lowers Mahogany Export Quota

MAR. 12, 2007 - The Government of Peru has lowered its mahogany export quota to 13,476 cubic meters. While significantly lower than last year's quota of 23,000m³, NGOs and Peru's scientific authority for CITES believe that the quota is still too high. The quota also does not permit (much less give a preference for) much of the certified mahogany that USAID and NGOs have been striving to establish as the alternative to unregulated mahogany exports. The recent visit of Deputy Assistant USTR for Natural Resources gave US Embassy Lima an opportunity to press NGO and Government contacts to suggest reconsideration of the quota, as NGO's have threatened to push for a complete trade suspension at the next CITES meeting in July.

Source - LIMA 707

19. Brazil: Officials Arrested for Illegal Amazon Logging

MAR. 2, 2007 - Brazilian police arrested 18 people accused of allowing illegal logging in the Amazon rain forest and were searching for 19 others, including environmental protection agents, the environment minister said. Marina Silva told Agencia Brasil, the official government news agency, that Friday's operation by federal police and environmental officials was aimed at ending violations of government rules limiting deforestation of the vast rain forest in the eastern Amazon state of Para. The suspects include loggers, members of the environmental protection agency, Ibama, and government workers of the Para state Finance Department and the Department of Science, Technology and the Environment, Agencia Brasil reported. The accused will be charged with crimes including corruption, forging documents, money laundering and environmental destruction, Agencia Brasil said. The amount of lumber illegally logged has not yet been calculated, said Antonio Carlos Hummel, Ibama's director of forests. The gang operated in the

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state capital of Belem and six other cities, he said.

Source - Washington Post

Wildlife

110. Brazil to Introduce New Biopiracy Legislation

MAR. 07, 2007 - The Government of Brazil (GOB) is preparing new legislation to address biopiracy in Brazil, which the GOB believes fuels a USD 100 million a year market for chemical, pharmaceutical

and cosmetics industries worldwide. The new legislation will feature electronic registration for researchers seeking government authorization and may also require payment into a "conservation and development" fund, for use by the Ministry of the Environment. If passed, the new law would seek to help combat biopiracy while at the same time improve bureaucratic efficiency for scientific research requests and encourage foreign investment in biotechnology.

Source - BRASILIA 401. See also

¶11. Chile's Melting Ice Caps Draw New Species to Antarctic

MAR. 7, 2007 - Scientists have discovered a multitude of new species inhabiting Antarctica's icy waters. The collapse of the Larsen icecaps - once in 1995 and then again in 2002 - allowed an international scientific team access to the previously ice-covered seabed 850 meters off the Antarctic Peninsula. The team's star find was a 10- centimeter-long shrimp, but their search revealed worrying changes caused by global warming. The new discoveries are the work of 52 scientists from 14 different countries who, during December 2006 and January 2007, boarded the German research ship Polarstern to carry out the Census of Antarctic Marine Life (CAML) project. The collapse of the Larsen icecaps (Larsen A and Larsen B) was the largest ice shelf collapse ever observed by man. The size of Larsen B alone is the size of the state of Rhode Island. The weakened ice split due to global warming, which is affecting parts of Antarctica more rapidly than anywhere else in the world. According to marine ecologist Julian Gutt, the opening of the sea bed revealed area

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sealed off for at least 5,000, maybe up to 12,000 years.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

¶12. Frogs Fading Into Silence

MAR. 05, 2007 - Frogs and other amphibians are rapidly becoming extinct around the world and in Latin American countries in particular. In the Caribbean as many as 80 percent of these species are endangered, while in Colombia there are 209 and in Mexico 198 amphibians may soon disappear. Environmental degradation along with habitat loss, ultraviolet radiation, disease and climate change are all factors involved in these unprecedented losses. "Amphibians are telling us that there is something wrong with our ecosystems," says Robin Moore, amphibian conservation officer with Conservation International (CI), a U.S.-based international non-governmental organization.

Source - Tierramerica

Science & Technology

¶13. Government of Colombia to Double S&T Investments

MAR. 01, 2007 - The Government of Colombia has decided to double its science, technology, and innovation funds for next year. In other words, the 2008 budget for the Colombian Institute for Science and Technology Development (Conciencias) will be 160 billion Colombian pesos (USD 72.2 million). According to Monica Salazar, advisor for the director of Conciencias, Colombia currently invests a total of 0.37 percent of its GDP in S&T. The current (reelected) government's Development Plan calls for reaching 0.77 percent of the country's GDP by attracting the private sector to invest in S&T innovation.

Source - SciDev

¶14. Brazil to Enter Satellite Launching Market with Ukraine's Help

FEB. 19, 2007 -The Brazilian government has informed that a joint

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venture company for rockets and satellites, established by Brazil and Ukraine, should begin operating this year. The information was disclosed by the Director for Space Policy and Strategic Investments at the Brazilian Space Agency (AEB), Himilcon Carvalho, in an interview to the state-owned Radio Nacional radio station. The partnership is aimed at launching rockets and satellites from the Alcantara Base, in the northeastern Brazilian state of Maranhao. The first launch should take place by 2009, according to the AEB, which completed 13 years of existence on February 10th, 2007. Carvalho also said that another goal of AEB is to launch the third satellite, built in partnership with China, which will provide images of the national territory, such as deforested areas in the Amazon, for instance. "We are currently preparing our third satellite, to be launched in 2007. The satellite is being finished after a test assembly phase in the city of Sao Jos dos Campos (southeastern Brazilian state of Sao Paulo), at the National Institute for Space Research (Inpe)," he claimed.

Source - Brazzilmag

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

¶15. Venezuela: Biodegradable Plastic on Its Way

MAR. 12, 2007 - A team led by physicist Alejandro Muller, of the polymer research department at Venezuela's Simon Bolvar University, is working on a new biodegradable plastic based on a mixture of polycaprolacton and manioc fiber (*Manihot esculenta*). The two materials "are as different as oil and water, but by making them compatible with a simple mixture, without many additives, we can achieve a type of plastic that, although costly, is more environmentally friendly," Muller told Tierramerica. The product "developed as a plastic packing material, can degrade once it is thrown out as organic garbage and become part of the biomass. The ideal is for everything to be biodegradable," he said. The new plastic can be used for manufacturing medical supplies to plates and utensils. "We are still in the laboratory phase, but industries are already showing interest," said the physicist.

Source - Tierramerica

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¶16. Brazil: Banana's Useful Fibers

MAR. 5, 2007 - Students from the State University of Rio de Janeiro (UERJ) are taking advantage of the banana stalk to develop BananaPlac, a colorful laminate that can be used for furniture, walls, car panels, among other things, replacing traditional formica. "It's an ecological product whose raw materials -- plant fibers and resins -- are biodegradable and are cold pressed, consuming little energy," says Bernardo Ferracioli, a partner at Fibra Sustainable Design, founded by the UERJ industrial design students who created BananaPlac. Production will be fomented among small cooperative factories, as a means to increase incomes in the communities that produce bananas, which tend to be poor.

Source - Tierramerica

Climate Change

¶17. Climate Change: Bolivia at Risk

MAR. 09, 2007 - Flooding in the eastern Bolivian department of the Beni has prompted a media debate about the link between this latest catastrophe and climate change; it has also generated discussion of the long-term consequences of the latter. While current water levels are only five centimeters higher than those of 1992, when Bolivia last faced massive floods, this year's disaster is arguably more serious than events of the past. That said, much of the flooding may be more closely linked to population growth and related

deforestation than to climate change. Also in the news, accelerating glacier melt provides abundant evidence of climate change, and studies suggest that a future of ever harsher and more frequent natural disasters is a distinct possibility, with severe droughts and floods increasingly common features of everyday life. Even in relatively conservative scenarios, climate change poses a significant threat to Bolivia's long-term economic development; as such, it deserves the attention not only of the Bolivian government and population, but also of the international community.

Source - LA PAZ 661

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Energy

¶18. Ethanol Is Not A Threat To The Amazon, says Brazilian President

MAR. 13, 2007 - The President of Brazil, Luis Inacio Lula da Silva stated he will not encourage the production of biofuels in the Amazon or in the Pantanal region. In his weekly radio program, Lula said that his administration proposes the use of already cultivated agricultural areas to produce raw material for biofuel production

Source - O Estado de Sao Paulo. See also "U.S.-BRAZIL SIGN MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING ON BIOFUELS", BRASILIA 433

¶19. Mean, Green, Vegetable-Oil Machine Arrives In Santiago, Chile

MAR. 6, 2007 - Alongside the new Transantiago buses, another spectacle could be seen trundling through the roads of Chile's capital city on March 5. A converted fire truck, fueled by vegetable oil and biodiesel, made for an unusual sight as it joined the Las Condes traffic on its way to the local McDonald's. When the truck's drivers, Seth Warren and Tyler Bradt, rolled into the fast-food restaurant to feed their truck, it wasn't a guilty hamburger they were looking for - it was food for their vegetable-oil-guzzling vehicle. Waiting in the parking lot, along with U.S. Ambassador Craig Kelly, were 12 vats of used cooking oil which will help propel the young environmentalists towards their destination of Ushuaia, Argentina. Tyler and Seth, both professional kayakers from Montana, U.S., have been on the road since March 2006 promoting alternative fuel and sustainable energy through The Oil and Water Project, which forms part of the Biofuels Education Coalition (BEC). During the presentation, Ambassador Kelly praised the project and the incessant work of its protagonists. "As ambassador, I want to stress that respect for the environment and the search for new sources of energy is not only an issue for government, but also for the private sector and for citizens," he said.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

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¶20. Venezuela, Cuba Ethanol Production Agreement

MAR. 07, 2007 - Cuba and Venezuela have signed an agreement to develop ethanol production from sugarcane, despite mixed signals from Cuban leader Fidel Castro. The agreement, signed in Havana February 28, is part of a joint effort to preserve the environment, reduce fossil fuel consumption and stimulate the use of alternative sources of energy. It follows a meeting in 2000 at which the two nations agreed to collaborate in the areas of health, education, agriculture, and information communication technology. Eleven ethanol production plants will be established in Venezuela, according to the Granma newspaper. The agreement states that the plants will provide a "starting point...to stimulate a high level collaboration [to] allow the development of new alternatives for energy sources in Cuba and Venezuela, contributing to the development of other nations".

Source - SciDev

121. Argentina Replacing Refrigerators for Energy Efficiency

MAR. 5, 2007 - The Argentine government will grant credits and subsidies in 2007 to consumers to exchange -- over the next three years -- old refrigerators for new ones that are more energy efficient. The initiative, coordinated amongst several government agencies, aims to cut overall household energy use. Roberto Lenzi, president of the Argentine Chamber of Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Industries, told Tierramerica that the new units use 20 to 30 percent less energy, and factories are investing to accommodate higher demand for efficient refrigerators. The "exchange plan" includes a subsidy of 25 percent of the value of the new refrigerator, if the consumer turns in the old unit for recycling and destruction. Credits are being made available to cover the difference.

Source - Tierramerica

122. Chile Announces Plans to Research Nuclear Energy

FEB. 28, 2007 - Energy Minister Karen Poniachik announced that her ministry would begin technical studies into the potential use of nuclear energy in Chile. Facing criticism from both the governing

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Concertacion coalition and opposition Alliance for delays in the government-mandated studies, Poniachik said the ministry would present a plan to assess the implementation of nuclear energy in March. Chile currently produces 7,500 megawatts of electricity a year, but studies show that the country's growing economy will need an additional 5,000 megawatts within ten years to cover the needs of both households and the nation's burgeoning mining sector. Chile's interest in nuclear energy comes as Argentina admitted last year that its natural gas supplies to Chile might be permanently cut as early as 2007.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

123. Chile Launches Energy Saving Initiative

MAR. 7, 2007 - Chile's government commemorated World Energy Efficiency Day on March 5 by launching a new energy plan aimed at saving USD 10,000 million in energy-related costs in the next 10 years. The Country's Energy Efficiency Program (PSEE) hopes to bring about a 1.5 percent reduction in annual energy consumption. Chile's increasing demand for energy currently grows by 6.8 percent every year. Finance Minister Alejandro Ferreiro and Mining and Energy Minister Karen Poniachik introduced three key areas where they hoped the country could seriously tackle its energy consumption. First, all new electronic domestic goods, such as fridges and microwaves, will be labeled to indicate their energy efficiency, as is currently practiced in Europe. Second, companies will be routinely audited to assess their energy management. Third, social housing is to be redesigned to minimize energy use and gas emissions. Without referring to recent discussion of nuclear energy, Poniachik stressed such energy savings would be the first step towards reducing energy demand and ensuring better energy security for the nation.

Source - Santiago Times (no link)

General

124. Argentina: Small Towns on the 'Endangered' List

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MAR. 12, 2007 - Hundreds of small towns in Argentina's richest agricultural region are taking their last breaths as a result of the unregulated expansion of soybean fields, their growing isolation,

and the government's indifference. At risk of disappearing are 602 towns of fewer than 2,000 residents, another 124 that haven't seen population growth in a decade, and 90 that no longer figure in official statistics, says the Responde Association, a group dedicated to the social recovery of endangered towns. Although a total of about 270,000 people still live in those towns, there is a steady flow of migration to more urban areas, where they face marginalization and poverty.

Source - Tierramerica

¶25. Argentina, Venezuela Boost Energy/Farm Cooperation

MAR. 9, 2007 - President Nestor Kirchner and his Venezuelan counterpart Hugo Chavez signed accords on March 9 to boost energy and agriculture cooperation. The highlight was a treaty to work toward the creation of a South American organization to coordinate exports of natural gas, signed in a ceremony at Argentina's suburban presidential residence. Argentina and Venezuela also agreed to jointly cooperate on scientific and technological improvements to boost agricultural outputs in the Venezuelan state of Bolivar. And the countries signed a commercial agreement to expand four research centers on potato crops and agreed to work together on the construction of two animal reproductive biotech labs in Venezuela.

Source - MercoPress

¶26. Environmental Health Conference Highlights Potential for Diplomatic Engagement

MAR. 08, 2007 - On February 1-2 experts working in the environmental protection and health fields convened in Washington, DC to discuss opportunities to improve global environmental public health. The conference, entitled "Integrating Environment and Human Health", highlighted challenges to people's ability to secure safe drinking water, breathe clean air, and avoid contact with harmful toxins, while sounding an urgent call for better coordination and planning to overcome these challenges. The conference also highlighted two issues that are attracting increasing attention by people working in

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the area of global environmental health: urban planning and global climate change. The international scope of topics discussed at the conference points to potential opportunities for diplomatic engagement on environmental health issues, including outreach to raise awareness of links between environment and health and promotion of cross-sectoral cooperation.

Source - STATE 00029246

¶27. First Amazon Basin Conservation Initiative Partners Meeting

MAR. 07, 2007 - USAID held the first Amazon Basin Conservation Initiative (ABC) partners meeting from February 5-8 to lay the foundation for developing detailed work plans to implement this regional, five-year, USD 65 million dollar program. Over seventy participants from the six partner consortia, USAID, Department of State, Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) and the Government of Peru discussed a wide range of conservation challenges, opportunities and program management issues. Participants agreed to carry out the following priority actions: 1) formalize ACTO/ABC relationship; 2) define priority basin-wide policy issues; 3) produce ABCI briefing packages for Embassies; 4) present ABCI program to national governments (by March 30), with discretion given to any local sensitivities to the ABCI program; 5) identify areas to support NGO partners in training and capacity building, communication and knowledge management, and monitoring and evaluation; 6) finalize life-of-project and first 18 month work plans; and 7) launch ABCI program with public events in each country. In addition to generating consensus on next steps, this event provided an invaluable opportunity for participants to identify synergies and outline priority actions. The design of this landmark program aims at building the capacity of organizations and public commitment for the effective stewardship of the Basin's unique and globally important biological diversity.

Update on Avian Influenza

128. Brazil Produces Cheaper and More Potent Avian Flu Vaccine

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MAR. 06, 2007 - Butantan Institute, an organization connected to the Secretariat of Health of the State of São Paulo, in southeastern

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Brazil, is going to produce a vaccine against avian flu using Brazilian technology that grants greater efficiency, productive capacity and a cost reduction when compared to the technology used by other countries. According to professor Isaias Raw, president of Butantan Foundation, the vaccine should be ready for large-scale application in humans in 180 days at the most. What guarantees this differential to the Brazilian product is the use of an adjuvant, developed by the Butantan over three years of research, which increases the efficiency and reduces the volume necessary for safe immunization. In this case, it is a component called Monophosphoryl Lipid A (MPLA), one of the products in the development of the whooping cough vaccine. Butantan is one of the five centers for vaccine production that the World Health Organization (WHO) has chosen for its task force to fight the disease all around the world.

Source - Brazil

SOBEL